

Fay Triplett Collection

by Peter Christensen, UC Extension Viticulture Specialist, Emeritus

FAY TRIPLETT WAS A BOTANIST who farmed wine grapes near Ceres in Stanislaus County. He enjoyed plant breeding and began making grapevine crosses in the 1940s. He was in close contact with Dr. Harold Olmo and began collecting breeding material from UC Davis, as well as from several European collections.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, Fay was retained by Allied Grape Growers with the intention of making new varieties available to cooperative members. When Allied disbanded, Fay involved Julio Gallo in his program. Gallo made and evaluated wines from the selections, and Julio commented favorably about a number of them.

Later, the UC Davis Department of Viticulture and Enology made and evaluated wines from some selections. I was familiar with Fay's program and made contact with him in the early 1980s to view his collection, which numbered about 80 to 100 breeder selections. Soon after, Fay sold his vineyard but was allowed to keep much of the collection until he could find another location for it.

I began moving some of his most promising selections to Kearney in the 1980s and collecting data from them. Ultimately, I brought down over 40 selections. Subsequently, some wines were made at Gallo and at UC Davis. All the material was donated, and I have records and correspondence from Fay on the crosses and his evaluation notes. I eliminated all but 21 of the selections, based on performance data, fruit composition and perceived potential for production or breeding.

Many of his crosses have interesting and complex parentage. Some are very high yielding for the concentrate market such as 99-9A, a cross of Vernaccia Sarda and Colombard; others show excellent viticultural and wine making potential for the Central Valley such as T194-1 and T793-1, black selections of excellent fruit composition and characteristics. Another black selection, F-16, has the highest titratable acidity of any cultivar experienced in the Central Valley, and it never rots. It should be retained for breeding purposes.



Peter Christensen (left) and Fay Triplett (right) taking notes on his wine variety selections at the Kearney Agricultural Center on August 13, 1991. (Photo courtesy of Peter Christensen)

Wineries such as E&J Gallo and Canandaigua continue to show interest in some of the selections. However, possible virus status continues to be a stumbling block toward commercial evaluation and acceptance. Thus, they need to be indexed and possibly cleaned up; many of Fay's selections were grafted onto older commercial cultivars. The collection also needs to be moved because I am now retired and can no longer maintain it at Kearney.

FPMS and the National Clonal Germplasm Repository at Davis are cooperating to preserve twenty-one Triplett selections in the Davis Repository collection. In addition, disease testing and shoot tip culture was started in 2002 at FPMS to clean up 99-9A with support from the California nursery assesment fund. Several other Triplett selections may be cleaned up at FPMS in the future. A table showing the parentage of each variety being saved is shown on page 5. 🍇

Parentage of Fay Triplett Selections under Trial at UC Kearney Agricultural Research and Extension Center

Black Selections:

30-47	Ruby Cabernet x Calzin
F1-13	T213-13 (61-9 [Grenache x Gros Manzens] x 74-21A [Zinfandel x Cabernet Sauvignon]) x T42-36 (Ruby Cabernet x Barbera)
F1-16	same as F1-13
F3-3	F170-10 (T4-9 [Ruby Cabernet x Zinfandel]) x Bolgnino
F3-4	same as F3-3
F3-5	same as F3-3
F101-3	F1-2 (T213-13 x T42-36 [Ruby Cabernet x Barbera]) x F793-20 (Grenache x Ravat noir) Parentage of 213-13 is: T61-9 (Grenache x Gros Manzens) x T74-21 (Zinfandel x Cabernet Sauvignon)
F101-4	same as F101-3
T51-16A	Cabernet Sauvignon x Barbera
T61-13	Grenache x Gros Manzens
T170-9B	T4-9 (Cinsaut x Ruby Cabernet) x Bolgnino
T194-1	Merlot x T46-14 (Ruby Cabernet x Koptcha)
T203-1	T4-9 (Cinsaut x Ruby Cabernet) x Ruby Cabernet
T213-19	T61-9 (Grenache x Gros Manzens) x T74-21 (Zinfandel x Cabernet Sauvignon)
T793-1	Grenache x Ravat noir

White Selections:

99-9A	Colombard x Vernaccia Sarda
158-8B	Colombard x Chenin blanc
181-7A	Colombard x Malvasia bianca
T34-1	Clairette blanche x Colombard
T82-4B	F2-35 (Olmo) x Catarrato
T182-4	Malvasia bianca x Colombard